

The “Real” Reason We Use Transfers Over Partner’s Notrump Openings!

When we first start to play bridge, we learn about Jacoby transfers in response to our partner’s notrump opening... and we are told that the reason that we should do this is because we want the strong hand (declarer’s hand) to be hidden, and that we want the opening lead to “come into” the stronger hand. But while those explanations have a small amount of validity, the REAL reason that we transfer is rooted in the bidding process.

By utilizing transfers, when responder bids 2D (forcing opener to rebid 2H) or 2H (forcing opener to bid 2S), the responder is now guaranteed a second bid, if they have a stronger hand that warrants another bid. On the other hand, with a weak hand, the responder does not have to bid, and the opponents will not know which hand responder has until they either bid again or pass...

Without utilizing transfers, it will be difficult for responder to communicate to their partner what to do: if responses are natural, responder will have to jump a level of bidding to tell the notrump opener that they have a good hand, and this will complicate further bidding. Imagine a sequence that starts out:

1NT – (Pass) – 3H – (Pass)
???

Opener will not have sufficient information to make an informed decision about playing in 3NT or 4H, much less about the prospects for playing in a slam!

Alternatively (with transfers), the bidding could proceed:

1NT – (Pass) – 2D! – (Pass)
2H – (Pass) – ???

Of course, the 2D transfer to hearts would show at least a 5-card heart suit, but would not promise anything else... specifically, it might be a very weak hand that has no interest in playing beyond 2H. In that case, responder will pass the forced 2H bid.

Now, responder can further describe their hand to indicate (at least) game invitational values and provide partner with more information on how to proceed... a raise of the suit will indicate extra length (at least six cards) and invitational values. A new suit would indicate a second good suit and some interest in slam. A 3NT bid would signify exactly five hearts and enough values to play in a game contract.

So, while the notion of keeping the stronger hand hidden is a simple explanation of why we use transfers, it is far from the most important reason. And now you know the rest of the story.